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Chinese B3 underlever: Part 1

March 2, 2018 by [Tom Gaylord](#) (B.B. Pelletier)

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by Tom Gaylord
Writing as B.B. Pelletier



The B3 underlever from China

A history of airguns

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Today was supposed to be Part 2 of the FLZ Luftpistole. However, as sometimes happens, fate had a different plan.

I started to chronograph the pistol with [RWS Hobby pellets](#). I said I thought the gun would be slow, but I had no idea how slow! The first pellet didn't leave the barrel. I cocked and fired again and it registered 67 f.p.s.

I tried deep seating the pellet and got one at 144 f.p.s. That was followed by two pellets sticking in the barrel. Obviously this pistol isn't ready to shoot! If I had planned it I would have taken it apart today, but I had a couple errands that kept me from having the time, so I decided to move on to the B3 underlever I picked up in Weatherford Pawn shop a couple weeks ago. That was at the same time that I got the [Benjamin 392](#) that I tested for you already.

Chinese B3

I saw my first B3 advertised in an *American Rifleman* ad in about 1986. It was being sold by a company called Compassecoco that I would come to know much better in the future. I think the price was \$54.50, plus shipping. I bought one, more to see what a communist Chinese airgun looked like than anything.

I still recall the ad that said I could expect 850 f.p.s. from the gun in .177. That was impressive velocity for the time. It was years before **chronographs** proliferated, so I had no way of checking it, which may have been a good thing.

When the rifle arrived I was not very impressed. The plastic underlever cocking handle was cracked, the metal finish was dull and uneven, the wood was pallet-grade hardwood covered by a thick shellac that had an orange cast. When the gun fired it smoked and smelled like bacon frying.

I had already owned an FWB 124 before receiving this rifle, so I knew what a good adult air rifle should and could be. I didn't expect the B3 to be in the same class as the FWB, but like I said, I was curious to see what a communist nation would put out.

The B3

First I must note that what I am calling the B3 is designated the B3-1 on Stephen Archer's website. He calls the rifle I have been calling the B3-1 the B3-2. Before I bow to Stephen's greater familiarity with Chinese airguns, though, I must note that the label B3 and B3-1/2 is used randomly all over the internet. Therefore, I am going to continue to call this a B3 until someone gives me solid evidence that it isn't.



The B3 (top) above the B3-1. The white rectangles on the butts are safety warnings. Look at the rear sight locations.

The rifle

The B3 I'm testing is a .177 caliber single-shot spring-piston rifle that's cocked by an underlever resting under the barrel. This rifle weighs 7 lbs. 2 oz. and measures 40.25-inches overall. The barrel is a trifle longer than 16 inches. The pull is 13.25 inches, which is short for an adult rifle, but still within the acceptable range. That makes it useful for more people worldwide.

The metal appears not to have been polished and bears some grinder marks on the outside of the spring tube. The marks have been blued over, so they were there at the factory. The stock is the same pallet-grade hardwood I mentioned at the beginning. The finish is just as thick and uneven as I remember, but the color seems less orange. Of course I'm red-green colorblind, so don't go by me. I did find some wood filler, which is a hallmark of the cheap Chinese spring gun.



Arrows point to an area of the spring tube that was ground before bluing at the factory. It's difficult to see in a photo but it jumps out when you hold the rifle.



The wood finish is easier to see. This picture is in focus. That's how thick the factory laid on the wood finish.



Most Chinese air rifles from this era have wood filler in the stock somewhere. This is actually a very small amount.

The test rifle has been abused by leaving it lying around. As a result, the metal is rusty and there are large dents in the stock. My B3-1 that I bought new years ago still has a deep blue on the metal and no visible rust. I don't think it was polished before bluing, either.

How can you tell?

So, what makes the B3 different than the B3-1? The most visible differences are the sights. For starters, on the B3 that is the older rifle the rear sight is located toward the rear of the spring tube, where it is almost too close to your eye for proper use. It will be difficult for many shooters to use it. The later B3-1 mounts the rear sight just in front of the sliding compression chamber which is about right. When the rear sight is too close to your eye the notch becomes both too large to use and also out of focus.

But the differences don't stop with the rear sight. There is a subtle but definite difference in the front sight, as well. The B3 front sight is an assembly that has been slipped over the barrel and anchored by a cross pin that's drilled through the barrel. The B3-1 has the same front sight, but is a press fit without the locating pin.



The older B3 has this pin through the sight assembly, pinning it to the barrel.

Who cares?

These two rifles look so similar. Who cares about those little difference? Here is why you, as a collector, should care. The older guns had fewer safety features and were known to slip off their sears while they were being loaded. The sliding compression chamber would then slam forward and shear off any fingers that were in the way.

It is therefore in your best interest to know this and also to know the differences between the older models and the newer ones.

The rifle I'm testing has an anti-beartrap, so it isn't the oldest B3 out there. I don't think the earliest ones had the anti-beartrap. The seals were dry when I acquired it and I shot the first Hobby pellet at 370 f.p.s. After 10 drops of [Crosman Pellgunoil](#), the velocity with the same pellet was 609 f.p.s. Once the oil has a chance to soak into the piston seal, it might get even faster.

I might tear into this one and tune it, just for the fun of it. They aren't that easy to take apart, but there is a lot of information about how to do it and new parts are available.

The Compasseco connection

Most B3s were sold by private gun dealers who bought them for next to nothing and sold them at gun shows. So, when

fingers started getting chopped off, nobody was responsible — except Compasseco. It became their problem, only because they were so large.

And they did something about it. They went to China and talked to the factory not once but dozens of times over many years, getting major safety improvements and then refining the design of the gun. They spread out into other Chinese airgun lines and the association worked to the benefit of both them and the Chinese manufacturers. The Chinese learned what American shooters wanted and the shooters got guns that were always improving. The airgun industry today owes a debt of gratitude to Compasseco for opening this dialog in the 1970s.

The B3-1 is still being offered for sale today. That means the rifle has been around for at least 4 decades and maybe more. Only the HW35 is older, to the best of my knowledge.

Next

I plan to test this rifle in my conventional way and then perhaps I will have a go at tuning it. I actually have tuned a Chinese air rifle in the past and gotten it to shoot very sweetly, but it's been a while.



Tom Gaylord (B.B. Pelletier)

Tom Gaylord, also known as B.B. Pelletier, provides expert insights to airgunners all over the world on Pyramyd AIR. He has earned the title The Godfather of Airguns™ for his contributions to the industry, spending many years with AirForce Airguns and starting magazines dedicated to the sport such as Airgun Illustrated. [See Full Bio >](#)

232 thoughts on “Chinese B3 underlever: Part 1”

 **Siraniko**

March 2, 2018 at 12:13 am

B.B.,

One could almost wish that they had converted the rear sight into a peep sight like Diana used to do. Maybe you should put a link to the old report in the new report? </blog/2010/08/industry-brand-b3-1-part-3/>

Siraniko

[Log in to Reply](#)

 **B.B. Pelletier**

March 2, 2018 at 5:26 am

Siraniko,

I thought about doing that, but I didn't want to confuse readers. On the other hand, I will be making comparisons, so I still don't know.

B.B.

[Log in to Reply](#)



Siraniko

March 2, 2018 at 9:51 am

B.B.,

At the least I think they deserve a footnote in the history of airguns section.

Siraniko

[Log in to Reply](#)



Ian

February 21, 2024 at 12:24 am

I recently acquired a Air rifle that looks identical to the one you call a b3. Except mine is stamped with the BB and pellet symbols then stamped LEE THEN 0.177 C-1 (4.5) MADE IN CHINA



[Log in to Reply](#)



B.B. Pelletier

February 21, 2024 at 4:00 am

Ian,

The Chinese made many versions of the B3. Yours is one of them.